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SUBJECT: BULGARIAN ACTIVISM IN THE EU (C-RE8-00416)

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[1](#)C. SOFIA 00017

[1](#)D. SOFIA 00229

[1](#)E. SOFIA 00254

Classified By: POL/ECON Chief Jim Bigus for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: This cable is in response to REFTEL A questions posed by Washington Analysts regarding how the CE-10 are operating in the EU. Washington analysts may also refer to Embassy Sofia's previous cables on Bulgaria and the EU for additional information (REFTEL B, C, D, E). Post's responses to REFTEL questions follow below.

[1](#)2. (C) A. Bulgarian Members of Parliament (MEPs) usually jointly introduced motions for resolutions within their larger parliamentary group. Examples include, motions to wrap up a particular debate on an issue or support a larger issue, such as the freedom of movement within the EU. Bulgarian MEPs initiated resolutions in 2007 regarding the five Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor -- who had been jailed and sentenced to death in Libya on allegations that they purposely infected Libyan children with AIDS and were later freed in July 2007.

[1](#)3. (C) B. Bulgaria tends to follow the EU common position on most issues, especially controversial subjects, and rarely tries to set the EU agenda, leaving that up to "Big" EU member states. Bulgaria tends to assume more of a leadership role on regional issues -- the Trans-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, Turkey, and the Caucasus. Some Bulgarian think-tanks feel that Bulgaria should champion the Western Balkans' Trans-Atlantic integration within the EU more actively by sharing Bulgaria's experience -- successes and failures. A contact at a local think-tank said that Bulgaria is experiencing difficulties in adjusting to Washington's and Brussels' "demands to assume a "leadership" position on key regional issues. According to our contacts, leadership is a new concept and experience for Bulgaria. According to our contact, Bulgaria will take a "project" approach on the Black Sea/Balkan issues because of Bulgaria's lack of regional experts. Of course, Bulgaria takes a stronger position on issues it sees as important to its national interests. For example, the spelling of the "euro/evro" became an important national issue in October 2007. Bulgaria won the right to spell the euro common currency as "evro" after threatening not to sign Montenegro's Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). Sofia employed the cultural argument that "evro" is the correct transliteration of "euro" into Cyrillic. The EU eventually backed down, and Sofia saw this as a great victory in the EU.

[1](#)4. (C) C. & D. Coalitions and Partnerships within the EU.

As mentioned above, Bulgaria usually follows the EU common position on most issues, such as the EU common policy on climate change or Iran. According to one local think tank, the "Big vs. Small" EU member states or what they called "functional coalitions" is an important EU dynamic. Bulgaria needs to "figure out" that it is a "medium" sized country and that it has a bigger say on EU issues than it perceives it does. Before its January 2007 EU accession, the Bulgarian National Assembly (Parliament) appointed 18 "observers" to the European Parliament (EP) that served as full Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) until Bulgaria held its first EP elections on May 20, 2007. While serving as "observers," these officials learned the bureaucratic ropes of the EP. Not all of the observers were elected as MEPs in the EP election in May 2007, and some of that prior experience of working in the EP was lost. Bulgaria currently has 18 MEPs from the following national parties: five members from GERB, who belong to the European People's Party (EPP); five members from Coalition for Bulgaria (Socialists), who belong to the Party of European Socialists; four members from MRF and one from NMSS, all who belong to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE); and three members from ATAKA, who belong to the group Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS).

15. (C) Bulgarian MEPs tend to pursue Bulgarian national interests within the larger EU Parliamentary Groups. For example, Bulgarian MEPs from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) would on an issue of Bulgarian national interest within the larger EU Parliamentary Group. Of course, some Bulgarian MEPs are more active than others. According to our in-house local analysts, the GERB MEPs, especially Nikolai Mladenov and Petya Stavreva, are, in general, active within the EP and their respective committees (all MEPs serve on various

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committees). Three Bulgarian MEPs are vice-chairs of EP committees. Biliiana Raeva, an NMSS MEP, is the Chairperson of the Delegation for Relations with Switzerland, Norway, and the European Economic Area (EEA) Joint Parliamentary Committee. Kristian Vigenin, of the BSP, is vice-chair of the EP Group Party of European Socialists.

16. (C) E. & F. How is the country not working well in the EU? Bulgaria is experiencing difficulties with its EU and international image. Bulgaria joined the EU on January 1, 2007 with conditions. EU officials set tough entry requirements, reflecting their concerns about Bulgaria's fight against corruption and organized crime, ability to control and distribute EU funds, food safety, and aviation safety. Brussels is closely monitoring these areas and has threatened to invoke safeguard measures if Bulgaria cannot produce tangible results. Such measures can be invoked for up to three years after accession, and could range from withholding EU funds (structural or agricultural), to food export bans, or non-recognition of Bulgarian legal decisions.

The February European Commission's (EC) interim monitoring report noted some progress in improving the judicial system, but criticized Bulgaria's lackluster progress in combating organized crime and high-level corruption. The next report on Bulgaria's progress will be issued in July, and if there is no significant improvement, sanctions could be invoked. During his March 28 visit to Sofia, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso publicly reminded Bulgarian leaders that the EU expects more concrete results in the fight against organized crime and high-level corruption. Barosso added that, "We cannot be all the time repeating that more needs to be done. . . Endless investigations, delayed court cases do not amount to justice." The recent uptick in contract-style killings and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) scandal -- which eventually led to the resignation of Interior Minister Rumen Petkov -- has only worsened Bulgaria's image problems. Bulgaria's pre-accession funds (SAPARD, PHARE, and ISPA) have already been frozen (see REFTEL B and paragraph number 10 on structural funds below). The EU monitoring mission that visited Sofia the week of

April 14 in preparation for the July comprehensive monitoring report privately expressed frustration and pessimism about Bulgaria's progress on judicial reform, crime and corruption (REFTEL E).

17. (C) G. Staff and Resources -- Bulgaria has sufficient staff and financial resources devoted to its mission in Brussels and EU offices with the MFA. Bulgaria's Permanent Representation to the Brussels is the largest Bulgarian diplomatic mission abroad, and employs over 80 diplomats, administrative and technical staff from the MFA and other ministries. Boyko Kotzev is the Bulgarian Ambassador to the EU. The MFA has an EU Directorate divided into several offices. Bulgaria's EU membership triggered a "brain drain" of highly-qualified civil servants, economists, and translators in EU languages from Sofia to offices in Brussels and Strasbourg. According to the Bulgarian/EU NGO the European Institute (EI), there is "no institutional stability" in Bulgaria because it lacks "highly qualified, well-trained, civil servants working in government ministries in Sofia."

18. (C) H. EU NGOs -- Yes, there are several Bulgarian EU NGOs. The European Institute (EI) is an NGO that was founded in April 1999 in response to increased efforts to speed up Bulgaria's EU accession preparation. EI was established with the support of Mr. George Soros, founder of the Open Society Institute and the Soros Foundation Network. EI has four main areas of activity: research on EU accession and enlargement; technical assistance, provision of advice for a range of governmental and NGOs on EU-related issues; raising public awareness on EU accession/membership; training and exchange of experience. EI together with the Center for Policy Modernization and Europe Gateway launched a large-scale communication project called "Now - Interacting with the European Parliament" that increases the knowledge and understanding of EU political issues, the role and functioning of the EP, and stimulate public debate on EU institutions. The Bulgarian European Community Studies Association (BECSA) is another NGO that unites Bulgarian academics, researchers, and Bulgarian civil servants, and politicians closely connected with the EU and European community. BECSA develops and fosters Bulgarian civil society in adopting European norms, disseminates information to the Bulgarian public, government, and professional community about European integration, including Bulgaria's participation in European institutions and structures.

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19. (C) I. Learning period -- Yes, Bulgaria is in a learning period concerning how best to operate within the EU, and this could take a few years. According to EI Bulgaria is fully integrated within the EU bureaucracy (on the daily tasks), and Bulgarians who worked in Brussels before the country's membership provide experience. According to our NGO contacts, it will take time for Bulgaria -- the government, private sector, and the public -- to get used to EU or European norms and to EU bureaucracy. A little more than a year after accession, most Bulgarians still support the EU, but increasingly realize that membership will not provide the instant reform, higher wages, and immediate improvement in living standards many had expected. Bulgaria remains the poorest EU member state despite consistently strong economic growth. Many Bulgarians feel they have second class status within the Union, and convergence processes have caused an inflation spike, eroding the living standards for lower income workers (REFTEL C). EI feels that Bulgarian public support for the EU is decreasing because of the sharp rise in prices and because they have not seen economic benefits as fast as they had hoped (NOTE: It could be a longer wait since pre-accession funds are frozen).

10. (C) J. Structural Funds -- Clearly, Bulgaria is not doing well in the absorption of EU funds. Recently, a deputy

minister of economy stated publicly that Bulgaria does lack the capacity to absorb EU funds. The European Commission temporarily froze SAPARD money for Bulgaria in March due to an ongoing external investigation for abuse of EU funds by a number of Bulgarian companies. The freeze will affect 49 ongoing projects worth USD 63 million. The EU has already frozen Bulgaria's funding under two other pre-accession programs, PHARE and ISPA (REFTEL B). Overall, Bulgaria is supposed to receive seven billion euro through various EU funding mechanisms by 2013.

¶11. (C) K. How do older EU members view the impact of new members states. As mentioned previously, Bulgaria has a tarnished image within the EU and internationally because of its lackluster fight against organized crime and corruption. A spate of recent mob-related murders and a corruption scandal that eventually led to Petkov's resignation further tarnished Bulgaria's image at home and abroad (REFTEL D). From our perspective in Sofia, the British and the Dutch embassies serve as our allies in our Rule of Law initiatives (such as the closure of duty free shops). The European Council on Foreign Relations perceives Bulgaria as Russia's "friendly pragmatist," especially regarding energy deals. Bulgaria's international critics prior to Bulgaria's EU accession feared that Bulgaria would be Russia's "Trojan horse" in the EU. Russian diplomats in Brussels and Sofia have referred to Sofia as Russia's "bridge" to the EU.

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